ECONSTOR
Make Your Publications Visible.

A Service of

ZBW Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft
Leibniz Information Centre for Economics

Hawke, Gary

Working Paper

Education reform: The New Zealand experience

NZ Trade Consortium Working Paper, No. 20

Provided in Cooperation with:
New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER), Wellington

Suggested Citation: Hawke, Gary (2002) : Education reform: The New Zealand experience, NZ Trade Consortium Working Paper, No. 20, New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER), Wellington

This Version is available at:
https://hdl.handle.net/10419/66082

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.

WWW.ECONSTOR.EU

Mitglied der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Education reform: the New Zealand experience

Professor Gary Hawke
School of Government, Victoria University of Wellington

NZ Trade Consortium working paper no 20

2002

The New Zealand Trade Consortium

in association with the

New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (Inc)

8 Halswell Street
Thorndon
P O Box 3479 WELLINGTON
Tel: +64 4 472 1880
Fax: +64 4 472 1211

www.nzier.org.nz

Auckland office:
Suite 6, Level 6, Albert Plaza
87-89 Albert St, AUCKLAND
Tel: +64 9 358 0252
Fax: +64 9 358 1345

econ@nzier.org.nz

The Institute, its contributors, employees and Board shall not be liable for any loss or damage sustained by any person relying on this report, whatever the cause of such loss or damage.

1. INTRODUCTION

The New Zealand education system has experienced a great deal of change in the last 15 years or so. There is little desire for any wholesale reversal, and few would argue that the changes experienced have not included improvement. The description, 'reform', is therefore seldom contested. However, much fine-tuning is still occurring and debates about particular refinements readily spill over into reconsideration of some of the major changes that have been implemented.

The education reforms have been part of a much wider process of reform in the public sector, the economy and society.[1] While many in the education sector talk about 'reform fatigue' — as a response to any proposed changes other than those which they themselves advocate — they tend to exaggerate the extent to which educationists have experienced change relative to others sectors of the society and economy. Public servant, or health professionals, or industry managers, all think that it is they who have justification for 'reform fatigue'. Furthermore, some of the users of educational services, whether employers of those newly emerging from the education sector, or individuals and groups seeking to arrange continuing education or human resource development, or officials or industrialists seeking to arrange research contracts and product development projects, are all inclined to doubt whether there has been sufficient change in the education sector. The recent Budget included the government's evaluation of the current state of tertiary education as:

> "But the present system has significant problems of quality, relevance, duplication and cost effectiveness. This is reflected in a still small but growing list of tertiary education institutions in serious financial difficulties. This is also reflected in lack of differentiation, employer dissatisfaction, the proliferation of degree courses, unnecessary competition, and underproduction of key skills across a wide range."

This should be understood in the context of an argument between government and tertiary education institutions about appropriate funding levels, but it hardly suggests pride in a reformed education system. And while it relates to the tertiary system, a newly combined business lobby group, Business New Zealand, which brings together former associations of employers and manufacturers, chose for its first public statement,[2] an attack on the education system in terms of the terrible state of reading and mathematics among new employees, inappropriate skill formation so that there was a surplus of design students and an absence of sewing machine technicians, and all kinds of other ills such as were common in employers' complaints before the reforms started.

The course of education reforms is not simple.

2. ORIGINS

Reform was not a new experience for the education sector. Even if attention is confined to the second half of the twentieth century, the education sector had debated and accommodated major changes such as the development of a key school qualification, School Certificate; and it had absorbed internal assessment in the form of accreditation of schools to issue the qualification of University Entrance. School Certificate introduced a new school subject, Social Studies, in place of traditional History and Geography; we still hear debate about whether some allegedly traditional school syllabus is not well established and being subverted by current changes. Appropriate moderation so as to guarantee national consistency is part of the current debate about a proposed National Certificate of Educational Attainment.

---

[1] G. Rice (ed.) *The Oxford history of New Zealand: revised edition* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), B. Silverstone et al. *A study of economic reform: the case of New Zealand* (Amsterdam etc: Elsevier, 1996), J. Boston et al. *Public management: the New Zealand model* (Auckland etc; Oxford University Press, 1996), Graham Scott *Public sector management: challenges and issues* (Wellington: NZBR, 2001).

[2] *Dominion* 2 May, 2001

Every generation revisits earlier debates, and many wheels are reinvented. But there are key issues about how an education system serves its contemporary economy and society, and definition of the syllabus and construction of qualifications are among them. Finality is not attainable, and desire for stability and the security of the familiar, whether among educationists or among employers and other users of educational services, is doomed to continuing disappointment. Education is inherently related to a search for improvement. We can expect some periods of especially intense reform, and some periods of relative quiescence, but reform is endemic rather than episodic.

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, debate about reform in New Zealand education was centered within the sector while drawing on contributions from other sectors. An Economic Development Conference emerged from a more narrowly focussed Advisory Committee on Education Policy, and generally endorsed the existing trend towards more use of internal assessment and a wider range of educational opportunities. A long-standing debate on the place of the school system run by the Roman Catholic religious minority within the national school system gave way to debate about the place of values and how schools should respond to changing social mores and sexual behaviour. Changes in the political climate frustrated those who thought that the education system was about to experience a significant liberation of the talent it contained. All of this was within a general climate of opinion — international as well as in New Zealand — in which education was seen as a significant contributor to economic growth and to social mobility. Indeed, much attention was paid by educationists to whether schools were contributing to equality of opportunity and social mobility, and a director-general of education in the early and mid-1980s has reflected that it was generally thought that the most significant critics were on the left of the political spectrum. At the same time, there were many business grumbles about decline in core skills of arithmetic and spelling, and there were more serious concerns about the ability of the school system to meet the demands of specific social groups, especially young urban Maori.[3]

There was therefore, a long history of debate and change on which the reforms since about 1985 drew. However, the reforms were not simply the next step in a process of continual adaptation. In 1984, a new reforming government was elected to office, one which because of the accidents of political history had few commitments to existing institutions and which was led by individuals who were at least for much of the time as concerned about their place in history as with the next election result. Education was caught up in the general thrust (and excitement) of a questioning of all conventions and a determination to focus public policy on efficiency and equity. Every element of the policy was questioned, but abstention from reform was impossible.

Education was part of the process because it was a significant element in public expenditure and all public expenditure was re-examined. Whether education was best delivered through a large public bureaucracy or though some other units which looked more like business firms may have been a strange question to many educationists but it was very natural to those who wanted to ensure that the public sector contributed as much as possible to living standards and a vibrant society. There was plenty of room for misunderstanding. The question of whether the right balances had been struck among expenditure on early childhood education, schools, tertiary education, and informal and adult learning was more likely to be understood in the same way by all participants in the debate. However, traditional 'public sector' thinking was that existing funding continued while adjustments were made through the direction of additional funding, but suddenly what was contemplated was a cessation of existing activities or their transfer from the public to the private sector.

Furthermore, the pressure on education was not frontal. Rather, the government's programme of reform of the public sector and economy generated levels of unemployment which were unprecedented in New Zealand. In response, the government organised schemes intended to assist

[3] I am grateful to Sir Frank Holmes, the convener of the EDC, for his reflections on that exercise (and much else), and to Bill Renwick, Director-General of Education from the late 1970s to 1988 for discussion of many issues, including his own writing such as *Moving target: six essays on education policy* (Wellington: NZCER, 1986). The best general history of education in the relevant period is: Graham and Susan Butterworth *Reforming education: the New Zealand experience 1984-1996* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1998). See also H. *McQueen Education is change: twenty viewpoints* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1994).

those affected to find new employment.[4] The initial idea was that young people would be given an opportunity to adapt their existing skills and knowledge so that they could shift from a declining industry to an expanding one. Those involved in running the schemes included local groups of employers who could be expected to know what skills were in demand in any particular locality, central officials familiar with the development and implementation of policy regarding the labour market, and providers of educational services, whether institutional or otherwise. There was a parallel Maori system. The experience of these people was that unemployed young had nowhere near the attitudes and skills that were expected from school leavers. Rather than focussing on specific skills, the relevant courses were 'life skills' that should have existed as a result of compulsory education. Furthermore, the standard educational institutions were not, in the view of the officials and employers involved, responsive to what was required; educationists responded that the employer and officials had no understanding of education.

The experience of the Cabinet Ad hoc Committee of Education and Training that oversaw this process, and of those involved in its implementation, has been greatly underestimated in most accounts of the New Zealand education reforms. Much has been written about the 'crusade' of the Treasury, and about the politics of the 'New Right' or 'economic rationalists', but the government department which was most critical of the education system was the Department of Labour, and ideological debate was less important than experience with unemployed school-leavers.[5]

There were deeper international trends at work. In particular, economic growth everywhere was coming to depend much more on human skills and capacities and less on natural resources than had been the case. In the 1950s and 1960, much thinking about development was focused on identifying specific resources and what was needed to transform them into marketable commodities. By the 1980s, frontier thinking was about identifying consumer demands, building the communications system needed to link consumer demands with everybody engaged in making their satisfaction possible, recruiting the human skills needed to produce whatever generated satisfaction, and only then thinking about what specific materials were required. Many people, including many educationists, were far behind the frontier in recognising the challenges to education. In New Zealand, what was required was not an ability to read simple instructions so as to contribute brawn and muscle to a modest transformation of agricultural commodities that could be sold overseas. What was required was adaptability to change in the face of computing and telecommunications revolutions. It was required throughout all successive age cohorts, not only by their elites. And because change was continuing, it was required throughout working lives rather than only at their beginning. 'Foundation education' remained important but continuing education was becoming more important, and its importance was spreading through society. Professional updating was no longer the preserve of a professional elite. The challenges in New Zealand, as elsewhere, were shifting education from selecting an elite to generating competence among all, and making lifelong education a reality.

Those were major challenges, but there were others as well. The role of women in society was changing. Attitudes varied towards the claims of parental care of young children relative to careers and to participation in the workforce, but demand for organised childcare and early childhood education was increasing. The claims for public subsidies for early childhood services relative to schools and tertiary education were necessarily under reconsideration.

Furthermore, the 'traditional' agenda did not go away. Why were educational outcomes different between Maori and Pakeha New Zealanders? Why were they different according to socio-economic status? Reform did not mean a complete shift in the education public policy agenda. It meant that old questions appeared in new contexts and were joined by new questions.

[4] They had various names and characteristics. The most important were eventually called 'Access' and 'MAccess', the latter being 'Maori Access', a significant effort to recognise the different needs of young Maori and the desirability of using Maori skills and knowledge in managing delivery of a public service.

[5] I had access to the papers of the Cabinet committee through the New Zealand Planning Council. Only a few educationists believed the significant debate was with the Department of Labour, although the Minister, Russell Marshall, and some senior officials of the Department of Education were very aware of it.

3. PROCESS

The specific reform process began with an ad hoc committee. The prime mover of the wider reform process of the public sector at the political level was the minister of finance, Roger Douglas, and he and his official advisers were keen to begin reconsideration of how health and education services were delivered.[6] The composition and terms of reference of the education committee followed negotiation with both the minister of education and other ministerial colleagues and with other officials. The convener eventually insisted that the terms of reference not contain any direction about fiscal neutrality and the committee was not Treasury-dominated — is origins are clearest in the emphasis on the 'administration of education', 'administration' rather than 'management' being educationists' terminology. It was also more congenial to traditional public administration than either what was seen as 'managerialism' or as an exclusively economic approach to public sector issues.

The committee was chaired by Brian Picot, a successful businessman, who however had experience in public policy debates through the New Zealand Planning Council and who had experience in the education sector through school level governance including contact with education of Maori. He was inclined to describe himself as a 'grocer' and the success of the committee in setting the terms of the public debate after the report was issued owed much to his marketing skills, but in fact he had a wide skill set. The slogan, 'good people, bad system' helped to ensure that a searching debate did not become a witch-hunt or make teachers feel excluded. The slogan, 'local autonomy within national guidelines' was even more successful in defining the core policy issue. It did not stop a great deal of misleading rhetoric about all decisions passing to individual schools or parents, but it gave an anchor to public debate.

Picot preferred that his role in the committee should be exclusively that of the chair. The government therefore added another member from the business world, Colin Wise. Specifically educational expertise was provided through Peter Ramsay of the University of Waikato and Margery Rosemergy of the Wellington College of Education, (a teacher-training institution). Whetu Wereta provided knowledge of Maoridom, Maori education, the public service, and research methods. The committee was serviced by a very strong secretariat, led by officials from Education[7], State Services Commission[8,] and Treasury[9]. The Picot report, *Administering for excellence* was released in April, 1988.

By then the government, first elected in 1984, had been re-elected. It had moved on to a general review of social policy, centered on the Cabinet Social Equity Committee chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, Geoffrey Palmer. It had constructed an agenda by seeking nominations from all government departments, and it had evolved a common pattern of Working Groups. They had independent chairs appointed by the Cabinet Social Equity Committee (i.e. after direct consideration by interested ministers). Departments most concerned with a particular issue would then be represented — in the case of education, this meant the departments of Education and Labour There some common relevant government departments, Women's Affairs, Maori Affairs, and Pacific Island Affairs because the prevailing sense of 'equity' gave a high place to inclusion of social groups often seen as marginalised in policy development. Treasury and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet were usually represented as key central agencies. Only later did it become known outside a very small circle that the whole development was contemporaneous with a bitter political struggle between the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, a struggle which Palmer tried to mediate at a personal level and to remain above in the direction of policy formulation. The really important element in the nature of Cabinet Social Equity Committee Working Groups was not, however, their composition but in the provision that responsibility for

[6] The health services outcome was the Gibbs Report, *Unshackling the hospitals.* It was only one among many reports on the health sector where the story of 'reform' is at least as complicated as in education.

[7] Maurice Gianotti, later first Chief Executive of the Education Review Office.

[8] Marijke Robinson, who in the 1990s was a key official participant in policy debates about the tertiary sector in particular.

[9] Simon Smelt, who remained in Treasury dealing with education and other policy issues until becoming a consultant with a similar wide field of work. He was author of *Today's schools* (Wellington: IPS, 1998)

reports rested with their conveners. They were not to be negotiated consensus documents. They were to sharpen the issues that really needed Cabinet determination. Significant dissenting views among members were to be included in reports and so made clear to Cabinet members (and eventually to the public since the general provisions of the Official Information Act guaranteed that reports would eventually be published) but conveners could avoid being detained by longstanding differences of opinion.

The range of Cabinet Social Equity Committee Working Groups was wide, extending to occupational licensing, regulatory reform in general, and pay equity. The existing Picot Committee and the analogous Gibbs Committee in health were more or less absorbed into the same process. There was a specific Cabinet Social Equity Committee on post-compulsory education and training, the Hawke Committee (which I chaired), and on early childhood education, the Meade Committee. It is my judgement that the most important committee for education generally was the Picot Committee. It was earlier in the field. It advised on the question of how schools should respond to the broad international challenges and on the specific New Zealand issues that I described in section 2 above. Those responses made fairly clear the broad lines of development to be pursued in other sectors of education.

Each committee made a report[10] that the government deliberated over and then published. Officials worked through recommendations and Cabinet made its decisions. They in turn were published[11], and the government publications became the core documents of the 'Education reforms'.

The Department of Education was disestablished, and among other institutions a Ministry of Education was formed. Its first chief executive[12] was specifically a change agent and his brief was to implement the government's decisions while a residual unit of the Department of Education (under a former deputy Director-General) ensured that existing systems continued to work until new ones were ready to take over. The immediate mechanism was often a set of 'Implementation Groups' on which institutional knowledge from within the sector was invited to assist officials to make changes and transitions as effective as possible while restrained from trying to relitigate the policy decisions which had been taken. Gradually, the process resolved itself into familiar policy processes but sometimes with new players or changed expectations.

Initially, a government the deep divisions within which had become public knowledge guided the implementation process. The basic ministerial decision to go with the Picot direction was made by David Lange who was both Prime Minister and Minister of Education. But he lost office, and there were many who saw the reforms as part of 'Rogernomics', the agenda of the Minister of Finance and Treasury. Then in 1990, the government lost office altogether and was replaced by the National Party administration of Prime Minister Bolger. There was plenty of room for confusion about the political implications of the education reforms. This was especially so for those areas which remained under debate in the early 1990s, such as bulk funding of schools, and student loans.

The changes themselves will be discussed in the next section. There are however some observations which might be made about the processes involved. Some difficulties which were encountered were attributed to the way the principal proponents of change were not themselves responsible for implementation. There were complaints that educationists did not drive the reforms. (The point had less cogency in the case of early childhood education although it was leveled at some of the participants in the responses to the relevant Working Group). There is some cogency in such criticisms. Responsibility for implementation does concentrate the mind on feasibility. In the case of the wider public service, reform was facilitated by the fact that natural leaders of the public service itself directed it although that did not prevent claims about Rogernomics and a conspiracy among a few public servants at the expense of staff trade unions. However, the great merit of the process which was used was that it generated decisions. Debates which had ended in stalemate even when there was a large measure of agreement were brought to a conclusion. It is no accident that the 'reforms' eventually dissolved into continuing debates

[10] *Administering for excellence* (April 1988), Report of the Cabinet Social Equity Committee Working Group on Post Compulsory Education and Training (July 1988), *Education to be more* (August 1988)

[11] *Tomorrow's schools, learning for life, Learning for life two, Before five.*

[12] Russ Ballard, formerly chief executive of the Ministry of Forestry and later chief executive of the Department of Land Information.

about fine-tuning and discrete significant change in the standard policy and political processes — and it is desirable that the power of conventional processes should be confirmed. But a major change may be facilitated by ad hoc measures. And the demands of the international economy and the impact of international social trends made major change in New Zealand education desirable in the 1980s.

4. COMPONENTS

As noted above, the government did not accept all of the proposals of the 'foundation' reform documents, the Picot, Hawke and Meade reports. Furthermore, government decisions were modified over time, and governments themselves changed. So the content of the 'education reforms' is less than clear-cut. Nevertheless, there were some core principles or features that were central to the process.

The first was well expressed by the Picot Committee as making the school the 'basic building block'. More generally, and in less accessible language, the education reforms were in the direction of devolution[13].

The basic argument was the standard one against excessive centralisation.[14] Administering for Excellence was diplomatic in its language about past practice but in verbal presentations members and staff of the Picot Committee used a store of examples about how out of touch with the needs of learning some of the procedures of the Department of Education had become. Items for use in 'manual training', itself an antiquated concept, were not only no longer used in local industry but could not be obtained from traditional overseas suppliers and the department had located an Indian firm which still made them but at great expense! The Department could not have maintained its current practices in the face of the speed of change necessitated by the computer and communications revolutions of recent years.

The 'practical' argument complemented an educational argument. As the focus shifted away from selecting an elite for further education towards strengthening the skill-sets needed by all students in their later life and employment, it was appropriate to locate control not with central professionals but with learners and their agents — their parents and their communities. A Board of Trustees, mostly elected by parents, was the key administrative unit by which this was to be achieved.

The proposal was never to substitute local control for central. The Picot language of 'local autonomy within central guidelines' was carefully chosen, and the intention was to shift the balance between central and local in favour of the latter while retaining both central and local components. The Picot Committee took a pragmatic approach of reviewing the decisions required of educational administrators and asking where those decisions were best made. This led the committee to conclude that decisions could almost entirely be categorised as either central or school-based. The critical judgement was not to abandon a central administration but to eliminate the existing regional organisations, district education boards. In the 1980s, many businesses sought to control costs by eliminating layers of management, but accounts by members and officials of the committee agree in giving little role to such precedents; rather the committee worked systematically through education tasks and found that there was little which was best done at a regional level. In any case, the business 'downsizing' which was most effective was that which followed analysis of the tasks to be done rather than that which was driven by the notion that a 'flat' management structure is best. Often the two ideas would coincide, and those responsible for implementing a change often find it easier to adopt a simple explanation rather than seek understanding of what the strategic decision actually was. The likelihood of different levels of understanding between major participants and the 'coalface' is characteristic of education reforms too.

[13] 'Devolution' in New Zealand was used to suggest assignment of decision-making away from central institutions, while 'decentralisation' was used to indicate assignment of decisionmaking to local offices of a central organisation. The simple distinction soon breaks down but nevertheless the basic idea remains important.

[14] The classic source is far removed from New Zealand education; János Kornai *Overcentralization in economic administration: a critical analysis based on experience in Hungarian light industry* (Oxford University Press, 1959).

The same logic carried over substantially to the tertiary and early childhood sectors. The universities had had a University Grants Committee which was sometimes seen as a bulwark of academic freedom or institutional autonomy but which gave as its own principal justification the role of dividing government funding among institutions. If schools could deal with a ministry, it was difficult to believe that universities could not. And other tertiary institutions could be freed from excessive centralization and given the same capacities to manage themselves as universities. There were some compromises in the early childhood sector because learning institutions were sometimes organised in chains — the kindergarten and play centre federations, and the relatively new Maori network, kohanga reo. The balance between federations and their individual centres varied among them, and how they related to the Ministry had to be adjusted accordingly. That adjustment was worked out over more than a decade.

The Picot Committee hoped that a number of institutions would mediate between boards of trustees and the Ministry. There was to be a standard collective advisory organization, the Parents' Advocacy Council. It was an early victim of financial stringency when a later government asked why it should fund its critics. A School Trustees Association inherited some of its role but even the School Trustees Association came to depend on Ministry contracts and to lose credibility as an advocate for parents. The Picot Committee also hoped that Education Service Centres would emerge and extend the range of skills and knowledge available to schools. This appeared to be an attractive way of facilitating the transition to new employment of employees of district education board and they were given a transitional period of privileged treatment as Education Service Centres, but the experiment was not a success. Schools were not accustomed to locating and paying for services. There was widespread feeling that teaching was self-contained, and an even wider experience that inputs were 'funded' and 'provided', not 'bought' in a 'market'. The education service centres staffed by former education board officials were unlikely to have marketing skills, and in at least some cases, were probably short of any skills required by schools at all. Only now is it becoming possible to think more about schools really making decisions about how and where their requirements can best be acquired.[15]

This illustrates one of the central lessons of education reforms in New Zealand. Learning is costly. It is easy to attract support to 'more local autonomy' and to retain it even when it becomes understood that 'more' does not mean 'total'. It is easy to attract support to the notion that the focus should be on 'learning not teaching' although this will require explanation that 'learning' is not unguided and ill-disciplined learning and that while teachers will be managers and facilitators of learning rather than authoritative sources of knowledge, they will not be redundant. That the 'child is the heart of the matter' is simply good teaching, and it is right, but while it sounds good, the implications can be far from comfortable and proceeding from rhetoric to practice is not automatic. Focusing on students and locating decisions as close to them as possible requires greater responsibilities of schools, responsibilities that are unfamiliar and may even be disdained. What looks to one person to be local decisions about the requirements of local students will look to another person to be imposing a 'market' model on education. If local decisions are different, people will start to compare results, and there will be critics of a 'competitive' model as well.

There were two areas about which the Picot Committee deliberated for some time before deciding that central control was inappropriate; curriculum development and special education. In the earlier system, the Curriculum Development Unit of the Department of Education had been something of a magnet for skilled and innovative teachers. There appears to be obvious sense in concentrating talent centrally and disseminating improvements to the curriculum so that all teachers can benefit. However, the Curriculum Development Unit did not have a good record of persuading political and professional leaders to adopt particular changes (as distinct from endorsing a general need for change) and a central unit is unlikely to be responsive to local and regional variations in what is thought to be important. The professional status of teachers was judged to be incompatible with confining key developmental work to a small unit. The recommended strategy was therefore to restrict the central role to a strategic one, defining issues and assembling working groups of teachers to undertake the necessary development.

[15] For simplicity, this account is written mostly with primary schools in mind. District education boards had much less relevance to secondary schools. The story, however, is much the same as secondary schools had been used to securing their needs from district offices or head office of the Department of Education (and in the views of many school governors and principals, district offices were little more than gate-keepers of access to head office where decisions were made - eventually).

The outcome of this recommendation has been at best mixed. The curriculum has been assembled around essential skills and learning areas. The skills will be familiar to those familiar with OECD discussions of lifelong education and the wider economic and social trends which were discussed in section 2 above: communication skills; numeracy skills; information skills; problem-solving skills; self-management and competitive skills; social and co-operative skills; physical skills; and work and study skills. The 'essential learning areas' look very like the syllabus of New Zealand secondary schools for the last half-century but for the technological enthusiasm of the Minister of Education of the early 1990s: language and languages; mathematics; science; technology; social science; arts; and health and physical well-being.[16] Turning these into practical learning objectives for students at various stages has proceeded slowly. Trying to contain central controls to general directions and to leave room for regional and local variations and for the initiative of individual teachers has been difficult. Even a small committee soon has a large list of what 'must' be contained within a required syllabus. There is considerable migration within New Zealand — probably even more for children than for adults as families are dissolved and reconstituted — and parents expect their children's learning to be the same in one school as another. Schools find it easier to work in familiar subject specialisations without too much concern with the national curriculum, Teachers like the assurance of clear specification of what is expected of them and they and parents find it easiest to think in familiar terms. Furthermore, the specific core of the professional expertise of teachers is not self-evident. Should an individual teacher work with central high-level statements and prepare a classroom plan immediately? Or should there be an intermediate process by which curriculum objectives are turned into teaching plans, with individual teachers using their skills to deliver those plans to particular students? New Zealand has been closer to the former than most countries[17] and is likely to move towards the latter. The optimal balance is far from obvious. At one extreme, freedom from a stifling central control is purchased at the expense of costly duplication of effort and even perhaps of re-inventing wheels by individuals ill-qualified for the required level of strategic design. At the other extreme, teachers are not recognised as professionals but are treated as menial tradespeople doing what computers and videos cannot yet do. It is easy to decide that the optimal position is between those extremes, but hard to choose any particular position, and New Zealand has not yet reached an equilibrium.

Familiar curriculum issues exist alongside the results of attempted devolution. For example, the relative performance of boys and girls attracts attention, and is often related to the education reform process, but it is equally an issue in countries with quite different management and policy histories in the last 15 years. In many places[18,] there are worries about domination of primary school teaching by women and 'feminisation' of the curriculum. However, it is the economic and social changes described in section 2 above that has created a need for more reflectiveness and less 'closed' thinking such as is characteristic of manual labour — or which appears to traditionalists as 'feminisation'.

Special education is almost by definition a problematic area. It deals with the learning problems of children who have behavioural or learning difficulties, whether because of physical or psychological disabilities or for other reasons. As with other areas of special needs, both international and New Zealand thinking has been that children with disabilities should as far as possible be catered for in 'mainstream' facilities. There should be supplementary services, and schools should be compensated for the extra costs they incur. Inevitably, it is not easy to define who should be entitled to extra facilities or how much additional resource should be made available. The Picot solution was to establish the Special Education Service as a distinct entity. In addition to providing access to specific services, it used agents to determine eligibility for extra resources to be provided direct to individual students, to allocate additional finance to schools which enrolled students with serious disabilities, and to assist parents to negotiate access to schools of their choice. However, the system was never far from controversy. This year, the government decided to reabsorb the Special Education Service into the Ministry. Quite how a Service with over 2000 employees can be absorbed into a ministry of about 600 remains to be seen, and so even more is how a structural change will address the key question of reconciling highly diverse needs with standardised and centralised funding of self-managing schools. The

[16] *NZ curriculum framework* (1993)

[17] *In time for the future: a comparative study of mathematics and science education* (Wellington: ERO, June 2000)

[18] e.g. Australia, as described by Diana Bagnall in the Bulletin 5 June 2001, pp. 24-8.

issues exist irrespective of the central reforms which have been implemented. As with many other cases where shortage of resources is alleged, the real source of problems is that expectations have risen. There would be problems even if no reforms had been attempted, although the greater responsibilities entrusted to schools mean that problems are more visible than they were or than they would be if resentful schools appeared to acquiesce in enrolment decisions made at regional education boards.

Appearances and reality also diverge in respect of central institutions. The former Department of Education which had wide-ranging responsibilities was replaced by a Ministry of Education which was intended to have a policy focus although it also retained responsibility for managing the property of the schools sector. Individual schools had neither the expertise nor an appropriate scale for managing a significant property portfolio. In the early 1990s, a great deal of time and effort went into defining where the line fell between new property investment and major maintenance activity, which was the responsibility of the Ministry, and minor maintenance, which was the responsibility of individual boards of trustees. There was an opportunity for game-playing as boards sought preferential access to Ministry funds for 'deferred maintenance' before accepting occupancy agreements as part of their agreements for public funding. (There was much genuine 'deferred maintenance' as the systems of the Department of Education and district education boards had been far from exemplary.) This was mostly a transitional problem and has recurred only in isolated instances in recent years. But the problems of deciding when and how to close schools in areas of declining population, and about locating new schools in areas where the population is growing, have continued to take a lot of Ministry (and ministerial) time. Furthermore, schools which have been relatively unsuccessful in stimulating student learning inevitably require attention from the Ministry. Schools cannot be ignored even if they are characterised as 'failing' because not all their students can readily transfer to another school. The reform process, subject to the reservation about property management already discussed, envisaged a change from a Department with a focus on school-management to a Ministry with an emphasis on policy — essentially helping governments define their objectives and managing systems of funding and quality assurance within which self-managing schools delivered the education services required by those objectives. In practice, the change was less clear-cut, although it was in the intended direction. The Ministry continues to have a keen interest in school management. It seeks to preserve incentives to good self-management while intervening to provide assistance when required in return for a sacrifice of some local autonomy. In particular, schools in areas where there are particular difficulties with recruiting teachers and other constraints on generating good facilities have been encouraged to work together; the reforms are often said to promote competition at the expense of co-operation but the key constraint is the knowledge of principals and trustees about how to reconcile responsibility for a single school with participation in joint action by groups of schools. That is a core management skill, especially where business operates within a clear competition code, but it was not part of the professional knowledge of many New Zealand teachers or principals.

Other key central bodies established in the late 1980s were the Education Review Office, ERO, and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, NZQA. The former was proposed in the Picot Report as a 'Review and Audit Agency'. After some hesitations and changes of mind about the scale of activity envisaged, it developed in the 1990s into a respected quality assurance mechanism. It generates a great deal of information about how schools and early childhood centres are performing in general as well as informing trustees and parents about the performance of individual schools and centres. Its reports are all published; they would be covered by the Official Information Act anyway, but ERO has no power other than to advise and publicise. It was often unpopular with teachers and trustees, usually in response to critical reports. It was reviewed several times during its first decade. The current government assumed office with an inclination to absorb the functions of ERO back into the Ministry, but after another review, it accepted that ERO should retain both its independence and its existing functions. It has decided that ERO should move from a clear focus on summative auditing judgements in the direction of seeking to both 'assess and assist' schools and early childhood centres. How this will work out has yet to be seen, but in any case ERO changed substantially during its first decade. It was initially concerned with 'compliance'. Legal requirements were easier to audit, and even if some regulatory requirements seemed trifling, ERO could hardly appear to overrule the Legislature and regulation-making authorities. As principals and trustees came to accept that most requirements had justification, ERO transferred its focus to 'effectiveness' — what learning were students achieving? As schools

and centres enhanced their capacity for self-review, ERO moved towards providing them with examples of best practice and other guidance while not undermining their responsibility for self-management. The attitudes of the sector tended to be some way behind the practice of ERO. Indeed, after the most recent review, ERO was getting compliments for adopting recommended changes before the Government had adopted let alone implemented any recommendations.

The core conception of ERO came from the 'quality' movement which affected many institutions in the 1980s and which was essentially part of the general process towards identifying consumer demands and serving them. When former systems of an 'inspectorate' had disappeared, there was some nostalgia for the support it was alleged to have provided, although this was seldom evident when the inspectorate existed. The key was a shift from grading and evaluating individual teachers towards auditing achievement in student learning. There will no doubt be further criticisms of ERO, stimulated by adverse reports, but it does have the appearance of an enduring reform. In any case, there is always some tension between managers and auditors of any description. The extra cause of dissent between teachers and ERO is that teachers want reassurance that they are pursuing the right course of action while ERO insists that the objectives of teaching should be developed by interaction between the Ministry and the profession. Its concern is with standards; revered former Director-General of Education for a quarter century from 1938, C. E. Beeby, was right in observing that the reforms of 1988-89 would give ERO an important place, perhaps even more so than the Ministry: 'Whatever ERO expects, the profession will aspire to.'

NZQA was also controversial. It was designed to promote the conception of a variety of pathways to learning rather than a set of independent teaching institutions, to generate recognition for a wide array of learning rather than perpetuate old-fashioned distinctions between inherited qualifications for approved teaching and no recognition at all for other forms of learning, to help learners demonstrate to employers what capabilities they possessed, and to disseminate among intending students what courses were available to facilitate their learning. That is obviously an ambitious set of objectives. It challenges much established tradition. It really puts the learner at the centre rather than a hierarchy of educational institutions. It challenges much source of status within the education sector.

The New Zealand agenda shared much with other countries. (The construction of the framework took account of analogous developments in Australia and internationally. Mutual recognition of qualification is obviously important in an increasingly interdependent world.) That is again an implication of the response of education sectors in many countries to the enhanced importance of human capital in economic growth and social progress. New Zealand was unusual in seeking to include within the one qualifications framework both academic and vocational qualifications, and to discard any distinction between 'education' and 'training'. It was easy to get agreement in principal that the education system should be concerned with recognising achievement and not with operating barriers so as to choose an elite minority, but that agreement was often reconsidered as its implications became clear. Enthusiasm for reform diminished as it became clear that there was no place in the new system for what had been sources of satisfaction or income.[19]

Much of the controversy about NZQA related to the tertiary sector and to workplace learning. However, in one major respect, NZQA contributed to controversy and it was in a campaign – one might even say 'crusade' – which extended to the school sector too. As the guardian of the qualifications framework, NZQA was keen that individual learners should be able to construct their own overall course of study. They should therefore have information about the equivalence of courses offered by different providers. Providers should therefore disaggregate their courses of study into small components so that learners could choose which were most appropriate to their individual needs. The resulting challenge to the 'coherence' of courses of study was contested especially intensely in the tertiary sector, but it was also controversial in schools. The outcome has been some retreat by NZQA from the fervour of its advocacy of 'unit standards' and a willingness to accept for registration on the qualifications framework a wider range of sizes in learning units.

Within schools, the question of appropriate qualifications remains controversial. There are genuine educational issues about how qualifications should relate to a curriculum, and about what

[19] A feature of reforms more generally than only in the education sector. Cf. G. R. Hawke "After the world had changed", *New Zealand Books* 6(1) (March 1996), 19-21

assessment should be designed to facilitate learning and what assessment should be written down and accumulated into a record of achievement which conveys information to potential employers or anybody else interested in an individual's capabilities. These issues always exist, but they are especially strongly contested whenever there is change in prospect or under way. Currently, the government has committed itself to a new set of formal qualifications for secondary schools, National Certificate of Educational Attainment, NCEA, and NZQA is charged to implement it. Most of the design of NCEA was completed under a previous government, and current ministers were then critical of it; now those who were in government are in opposition and it is they who are critical. Political management is seldom simple, especially when it involves binding successors.[20] Not only politicians are involved. Teachers and teacher unions were unenthusiastic in the early development of NCEA. Some remain unenthusiastic or even opposed, but the predominant attitude is that the debate has gone on long enough and should be brought to finality. All that is required is for the government to give teachers sufficient resources to ensure that material compensation or reward accompanies new demands. Many arguments end when one party is exhausted, but it may well be that something is owed to the friendly attitudes between teacher unions and the current government contrasted with their general antagonism towards the previous government.

There were suggestions that the current government was not committed to maintaining NZQA as an independent agency.[21] Traditional educational thinking had reasserted itself and there were thoughts that qualifications and curriculum should be re-combined within the Ministry of Education. However, there is no sign of such thinking in current government policy. The decision to seek a unified qualifications framework was radical in the late 1980s, but it is certain that any attempt to maintain a distinction between academic and vocational qualifications would now be very problematic. The core argument is that employers seek personal qualities as well as knowledge of specific techniques, and that 'blue skies' research is provoked by practical problems. Furthermore, while it is true that the processes of curriculum design, facilitation of learning, and certification of competence is a continuum, it does not follow that analysis can proceed without some relevant and appropriate distinctions, or that management should never be decentralised. We have dealt here with only major institutional changes, and many other organisations became much more visible in the later 1980s – the Careers Advisory Service (known for a while as Quest Rapuara), the Education Training and Support Agency or Skill New Zealand, and so on. It is sometimes suggested that fractionalisation was taken too far and I have already discussed how the Special Education Service is now being re-absorbed into the Ministry. However, the picture of a single Department being split into a myriad of competing institutions is a caricature. Those familiar with education before 1988 know that the department was surrounded by a mass of special-purpose organisations with many variations of legal form and status. They also know that the presence within the department of a Curriculum Development Unit and a Qualifications and Assessment branch did not mean that officials concerned with those aspects of education talked to each other with any frequency or depth. Institutional design is an area for professional thought and decision-making; a simplistic notion of combining everything and gaining 'co-ordination' may be the stuff of political rhetoric but it is not a good guide to history or a sound basis for preparing for future learning.

In the interests of brevity, this account of the main components of the New Zealand experience of education reform has concentrated on the school sector. A very similar story can be told about other sectors, early childhood, tertiary, workplace training and other adult learning. There were, of course, sector specific aspects. In the early childhood sector, the government was not the owner of the physical plant; the standard-setting and audit roles were not constrained by the requirements of managing a property portfolio but did have to pay attention to how far it was proper to prescribe how private property was used. On the other hand, issues of student safety were even more pressing. Furthermore, there was less community agreement on the basis of a national curriculum for early childhood education; there was less agreement that the appropriate objective was learning rather than safe childcare, and educational psychologists were even more insistent than they were in relation to schools that individual learning patterns exhibit great variety so that it is

[20] Cf Murray Horn *The political economy of public administration: institutional choice in the public sector* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); G.R. Hawke "Binding successors", *New Zealand Books* 6(5) (December 1996), 20-1.

[21] It had been reviewed a few years earlier, "Strategic risks and opportunities: a review" (the "Laking report", NZQA, December 1996.)

difficult to formulate standard expectations at defined milestones. Nevertheless, an early childhood curriculum was developed and implemented.

In the tertiary sector, the University Grants Committee was abolished and individual universities related directly to the Ministry. So did former polytechnics, for which the change was more dramatic because while the universities had long enjoyed a great deal of institutional autonomy, polytechnics had been subjected to departmental control (even to the extent of the department managing payment of electricity bills with obvious implications for incentives towards energy conservation.) The term 'university', like 'degree' continued to have legislative protection and while the former Auckland Polytechnic became the Auckland Institute of Technology and eventually the Auckland University of Technology, the government subsequently exerted control so as to prevent any further new universities. This was a retreat from the principle that policy should be concerned with the nature of learning rather than the names of institutions. The reforms of the 1980s entrenched the notion of a degree as involving development of capacity to manage lifelong learning and therefore requiring that learning occur in an environment of research. This was contrary to much contemporary thinking in Europe and America. It survived the 1990s, but it can hardly be said to have much understanding, whether in educational institutions, relevant ministers or relevant officials. The relationship of the tertiary institutions to policy about research and development remains confused. Tertiary institutions were funded according to 'equivalent full time students', EFTS. Funding had always been determine by student numbers but what was once known to a few vice-chancellors and deans was now entirely in public, and EFTS was often treated as though it was an innovation of the Reforms.

The institutional components of reform in the tertiary sector therefore had many similarities and some differences from the school sector. As was observed in the quotation from the Budget at the beginning of this paper, the current government has determined that it needs more ability to control the system, and it has determined to create a Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). As the sector thinks a TEC will insulate it from political interference rather than give ministers new levers to 'steer' the system, and as the government's decision followed from some advisory reports by a Tertiary Education Advisory Committee (TEAC) which have attracted little support from official or unofficial policy analysts or from educational institutions, while TEAC reports on funding and institutional arrangements have yet to be written, the outcome of the government's decision is decidedly murky.

Underlying all this are questions of funding. Schools create controversy mainly by disagreement about the total level of public funding – which is an argument about priorities relative to health, other public activity and private consumption – and about how funding should be shared among individual schools. How much extra schools in low socio-economic neighbourhoods should receive is controversial; one might even suggest that there is agreement in principle that they should be helped but that children from relatively wealthy backgrounds should not be disadvantaged. Once 'disadvantage' is seen in relative terms, the prescription is internally inconsistent. There is also disagreement about the extent to which private schools should have access to public funds. And there is a specific issue about how funds should be delivered to schools. The Picot Committee simply assumed that boards of trustees would be responsible for teacher salaries within national pay scales. 'Bulk funding' or creating 'directly resourced schools' was a major political issue and the teacher unions were largely successful in retaining centralized employment conditions. To some extent, there were fears among teachers that lay trustees would not appreciate the value of teachers' skills, and apprehension among teacher unions that they would become redundant. However, there was also a significant issue of what aspects of education should be controlled principally by professional knowledge, and what aspects the agents for students should control. Any solution to this could come only from analysing educational services, but such a professional debate was pre-empted by traditional industrial negotiations.

There were similar but different debates in other sectors. The major difference was that the issue of public versus private funding was much more demanding. Substantially for reasons of historical accident, public schools are virtually entirely funded from taxation, while in all other sectors there is a mixture of public and private funding. Not surprisingly, debates tended to be more intense among people who faced paying directly. In the early childhood sector, the most intense debates were about how different forms of centre should share public funding and the implications that had for charges paid by parents. In the tertiary sector, the greatest debate was about the student loan scheme.

Not everybody shares economists' predispositions to believe that material considerations are most important, and there were serious issues in the education sector about who was best placed to make particular decisions – or who should control the syllabus or teaching processes. But issues about funding, whether public or private and on whom private costs should fall, are central to policy formulation in education as elsewhere. Education professionals were inclined to think that their expertise in education made them experts in education policy when that does not always follow. Important distinctions were often overlooked. Thus accountants have a professional responsibility for developing and monitoring accounting standards. That does not lead accountants to demand control of the businesses for which they compile or audit accounts. Teachers made no such distinction in relation to schools. There was unfortunately no distinction between professional leadership and industrial advocacy. So debates were often misconceived.[22] For example, in New Zealand we have had much discussion as though the issue is whether there should be a student loan scheme or not, all else being unchanged. That does not begin to make contact with the policy debate about how the costs of tertiary education should be distributed. It treats public policy as essentially a lolly scramble with those making the most noise or controlling the most space getting the most goodies. Of course, when ministers conceive a policy issue in essentially those terms, playing the game might be more rewarding than engaging in serious analysis.[23] However, one should not make too much of political personalities and processes. When a society has a high level of homogeneity it is easy to use taxation and public expenditure even when intergenerational transfers are involved.[24] As society becomes more diversified, the difficult task of allocating costs cannot be evaded. So funding secondary education by public processes is seldom challenged, but it will be if a significant fraction of the population declines to participate in child-rearing. Lifelong education sounds attractive, but it means that private benefits to education are likely to grow relative to genuine public benefits; we must expect debates about public and private funding to intensify for some time yet.[25]

5. MAORI AND PACIFIC ISLAND PEOPLE

Education reform was part of a wider agenda of reform. A particular aspect was responsiveness to New Zealand's indigenous people, the Maori, and to immigrants to New Zealand of Pacific people. At one level, concern about the position of Maori was simply the expression in New Zealand of the wider international interest in indigenous peoples, as expressed especially in the United Nations. At another, the Treaty of Waitangi between British authorities and Maori chiefs in 1840 was increasingly recognised as a founding document of New Zealand society and an earnest effort was undertaken to rectify historic grievances.

A special concern with Pacific Island peoples was sometimes seen simply as an extension of concern with Maori. They share a Polynesian heritage but Maori are indigenous whereas Pacific peoples are immigrants. The accidents of history mean that some are New Zealand citizens and

[22] As was true of public sector management more generally. Cf. G.R. Hawke "Roles, appropriate complexity and good timing", in *Future issues in public management* (Wellington: State Services Commission, 1997), 27-38.

[23] The arguments were not always between economic and others. For example, it is a report by social analyst, Professor Meredith Edwards, The effects of Commonwealth income support on educational participation, which most recently concludes that the targeted funding system, AUSTUDY, increased participation in post-compulsory education by those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

[24] Cf Claudia Goldin "The human capital century and American leadership: virtues of the past" NBER Working Papers w8239 (April 2001).

[25] We must expect a great deal of debate yet about lifelong education and the movement away from a short period of full-time study in early adulthood. It is very common to move immediately from the observation of part-time study to concerns about diminished or targeted student finance. However, we might notice that the change is also occurring in Oxford; Graham Topping "All work, no play?" *Oxford Today* (Hilary Issue, 2001), 36-7. The senior tutor at Lincoln tries to keep students to 12-15 hours a week! He prefers to use 'access funds' but "Many students ignore such procedures, fearful of a potential veto. Some object on principle. 'It's none of their business, so long as I get my essay in on time', complains an anonymous Master's student, 'and I don't see why working is held to be more dangerous than, say, going out for a drink.'.....Over half of English universities now officially acknowledge the inevitability of term-time employment, and support job clubs or careers service involvement. For example, Manchester University will help its students find work for up to 15 hours a week." Student expectations are not aligned with traditional ideas of full-time study, and the roles of mechanisms like student loans are far from obvious.

there are legal obligations to others. New Zealand is usually a small if not insignificant participant in international affairs, but to the micro-states of the Pacific it is more like a metropolitan centre. Some Pacific communities now have more members resident in New Zealand than in the homeland, and maintenance of languages and cultures depends on contributions from New Zealand. Their position is therefore different from those of other immigrant communities. It is a mistake, however, to think that their interests are always identical with those of Maori.

Most Maori and most Pacific Island people participate in mainstream education. Some distinctive institutions have, however, been developed. In the early childhood sector, kohanga reo – literally 'language nests', retention of the Maori language being seen as the key for maintaining Maori culture – were the result primarily of Maori initiatives in the 1980s. They are now a significant element in the early childhood sector, and language nests of various Pacific cultures have joined them. In the school sector, Maori immersion programmes developed into kura kaupapa Maori – approximately schools with a Maori rationale or purpose. In the tertiary sector, Maori institutions, whare wananga – literally houses of learning and originally mechanisms within Maori communities for oral transmission of knowledge of all kinds - developed alongside a great variety of private training establishments but were recognised as a distinct group with different claims on public funding.

The Picot Committee was keen to see Maori parents and students have more influence on their learning and it proposed a mechanism which would have facilitated distinct institutions although the Committee hoped that influence would be sufficient. Its intention was that because schools would have to be responsive to Maori or lose students, they would be responsive, and distinct institutions would be only a last resort. In any case, officials and ministers were less inclined to experiment than the Picot Committee and the ease of separation was not as great as was recommended. Nevertheless, kohanga reo, kura kaupapa Maori, and whare wananga provide alternatives and exert pressure on mainstream institutions. The Pacific language nests are so far more defensive instruments for culture retention and to make Pacific children more ready to enter schools – but that could have been said of kohanga reo in the mid-1980s.

The challenge to education policy is to accommodate such institutions within a national education system. The overwhelming response of Maori parents to what they want from the education system is that they want the same as non-Maori parents – the preparation of young people to live and function in a modern society. They also want their children to have self-esteem as Maori, although the extent to which that is demanded of schools varies regionally depending on the extent to which the local Maori community retains sufficient cohesion and strength to manage learning outside the school situation. However, given that the curriculum is overloaded, it is not easy to simply add a Maori component even if that would deliver what is wanted. (It is unlikely to, since it is likely to make being Maori an add-on rather than a feature of approach to learning in general.) Furthermore, as the Maori population is currently growing rapidly there are few teachers with skill in Maori language or culture relative to the number of Maori students. And some aspects of Maori culture are not always compatible with non-Maori institutional design, such as the selection of individuals to be trustees rather than locating accountability with the whanau – the community in general meeting.

There have therefore been many challenges in accommodating Maori and Pacific Island people and institutions within the reform experience of the last 15 years. But much has been achieved. ERO and the national organisation of kura kaupapa Maori have reached agreement on how delivery of the national curriculum should be audited within the kura. Some extremists will never be satisfied, whether Maori activists whose interest is in confronting the government rather than in the learning of Maori students, or of non-Maori reactionaries who think that 'New Zealand' implies one standard way of doing things from which there should be no departures at all. But there is a substantial centre between these extremes.

The main motive for paying special attention to this area is neither constitutional niceties nor political wrangles. Mainstream schools and education institutions have not served Maori and Pacific Island people well. In the 'failing schools' referred to diplomatically above, and in the Ministry's efforts to assist boards of trustees as also discussed earlier, Maori and Pacific island students are far more than proportionately represented. Any collective effort to prepare the young for participating in the future economy and society simply cannot ignore finding educational

processes which suit Maori and Pacific Island better than current ones. But not all is doom. There are grounds for thinking that the education reforms have improved matters.

6. EVALUATION

The ultimate test of an education reform is the extent to which it achieves its objectives. However, it is not simple to evaluate that success because the content of 'the reform' is not agreed. Academics would like to know whether the Picot, Hawke and Meade reports achieved their intentions. But they were never implemented as their authors recommended. Successive governments have further modified and sometimes reversed decisions. What are we to evaluate? Assessment is usually best done somewhere between the broadest aggregate levels and evaluation of specific measures even though that is not helpful to writers of general overviews.

One general evaluation was provided by ERO[26:]

It is sometimes said that 'enlightened understanding' is a key attribute of the democratic process. If so, it is a tribute to the reformers and those at the national and local level who have administered the law since then that the balance of power and responsibility struck between the

- ownership, purchase and regulatory interests of the Crown;
- interests of the schools empowered to provide educational services;
- parents and students with a stake in schooling; and
- role of the independent external evaluator set up alongside the Ministry of Education

have proved so durable.

That is more true of the school sector — the focus of ERO — than of education in general where we have already described some reversals in the tertiary sector. However, it remains true despite the change of government in 1999. Conversations about 'the reforms', at all levels of formality, tend to conclude with identifying problems but declaring against any wish to return to the pre-reform era.

There were many retrospectives on the 10th anniversary of Tomorrow's Schools. For example, the ERO Advisory Council on Quality in Education in November 1999 considered a number of reports which had then recently been released.[27] They varied in tone, but the positives outweighed the negatives. The Council's discussion reached the following conclusions, among others.

The Council supported the view that many trustees still feel marginalised, but schools were considered by most members to be more open and accessible than they had been 10 years earlier. Teachers had become more accountable to parents and the community, and parents are more sophisticated, confident, and prepared to challenge professionals. There had been a huge growth over ten years in the early childhood sector. Children who had experienced long term early childhood services for extended hours, both per day and throughout the year, were entering primary schools where the school system was not designed to cope with such continual demands and where the buildings were often used during only the core school hours. Whereas the value of schools as community institutions and resources had been asserted for many years, real change was finally in process. The Council concluded that the reforms had removed barriers and set up the structural arrangements for the establishment of köhanga reo, kura kaupapa and whare wananga. The Council recognised that achievements had been made in Mäori education, but also observed that there are still challenges to be met, including the misconception that because a person is fluent in the Mäori language they can also teach well. The reforms had been positive for

[26] ERO *Annual Report* 1999, p. 8

[27] ERO *Annual Report* 1998-99, Ministry of Education Legislation for Learning, Cathy Wylie *Ten years on* (Wellington: NZCER, 1999), *Review of school day and school year, good practice in managing the fully funded option* (Wellington: ERO, 1999). Had the discussion occurred a little later, it would have encompassed Edward B. Fiske & Helen F. Ladd *When schools compete: a cautionary tale* (Washingon DC: Brookings, 2000) but the conclusion would probably not have changed, especially as Fiske and Ladd attribute to the reforms some features which had existed much earlier and some which are probably not subject to policy influence.

Pacific people, although they were only coming to terms with taking an active part in decision making. To be balanced against the progress made, pockets of low morale among teachers and schools were acknowledged, along with the observation that schools were increasingly expected to provide services previously carried out by parents and the community. The change process could have been managed more effectively. (The Council's membership includes several teachers and a number of Maori and Pacific Island educationists.)

Many social scientists would prefer quantified analyses rather than judgement based on experience. But in the absence of quantified objectives or measures of educational service outputs or learning outcomes, not a great deal can be offered. Participation rates certainly rose. The recent government assessment of social policy outcomes shows participation rates in early childhood education rising between 1986 and 2000 from about 40% to 90% at age 3 and from 70% to 100% at age 4. Rising participation rates also characterised Maori children, although their rates remained lower.[28] Participation rates also rose in school ages (beyond the age of compulsory attendance) but a more common indicator is the achievement of specific qualifications. Changes in qualifications systems such as those discussed earlier restricts the value of simple comparisons. However, most measures showed increase, although not monotonically throughout the 1990s as there was some influence from economic trends as young people responded to employment trends.[29] Changes in the proportion of the population or labour force holding specified qualifications necessarily changes more slowly despite increasing participation in tertiary education and more mature students simply because the population and labour force reflects the patterns of previous years. But the trends were mostly in the intended direction.[30] Participation rates may measure directly the objective of access to learning, but it does not provide a good indicator of trends in learning. Nor does it tell us about the impact of 'the reforms' as distinct from other events and decisions in the 1980s or 1990s, although we might infer that the centralised system which existed before 1988 could not conceivably have coped with the changed numbers of students.

We cannot do much to disentangle the reforms from other influences, but we can turn to OECD international comparisons. Commentators sometimes read them differently, but the best simple summary is that New Zealand results tends to be 'middle of the pack'. That is true whether the measures employed are essentially of educational qualifications or are standardised tests of literacy and numeracy. New Zealand does well in some specific measures, but less well on others. An objective of being towards the top of OECD comparisons is still far from achieved. Furthermore, OECD analysis has increasingly drawn attention to the need to pay attention not only to averages but also to whole distributions of results, and New Zealand often tends to have a large and deep pool of poor performance behind a mid-ranking average. One would conjecture that this reflects the non-performing schools discussed earlier, including the concentration in them of Maori and Pacific Island students. One might even suspect that should New Zealand encounter another economic reorganisation of the scale of the 1980s, there would still be a significant number of young people in need of a great deal of remedial education. There is no room for complacency, but the situation would be even worse had the reforms not been initiated and maintained. And most of these comparisons concern themselves with literacy and numeracy rather than with the full range of skills and learning areas around which the New Zealand curriculum is devised.

7. CONCLUSION

The New Zealand experience suggests that education reform should be seen as part of wider social and economic changes; education cannot be insulated. Secondly, education reform is costly; old skills become less valuable and some individuals are unlikely to be enthusiastic participants. Thirdly, education reform is a continual process; there may be periods of especially strong focus, but there cannot be a discrete educational reform followed by 'business as usual'. Fourthly, results

[28] *The social report 2001* (Wellington: Ministry of Social Policy, 2001), 30-1. There are, of course, some issues in measuring participation rates, including enrolment in more than one institution.

[29] Ibid, pp. 32-3

[30] Ibid, pp. 34-9

are seldom clear in anything but a very long view. Those who initiate reform undertake a long difficult task and are unlikely to become popular. We might even think of Machiavelli and his advice to his Prince:

> And it ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new. This coolness arises partly from fear of the opponents, who have the laws on their side, and partly from the incredulity of men, who do not really believe in new things until they have had a long experience of them. Thus it happens that whenever those who are hostile have the opportunity to attack they do it like partisans, whilst the others defend lukewarmly, in such ways that the prince is endangered along with them.[31]

[31] In the translation of *The prince* by W.K. Marriott (London: Dent & New York: Dutton, 1908), 47-8